



**LIFTING THE HEAD HIGH IN EGYPT:
GETTING BEYOND GUIDED DEMOCRACY**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 02-17-11, p. A7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Maybe, it's because I'm from the Sixties and because of the lessons I've learned from revolutions I've read, studied and witnessed and no doubt because of the liberation struggle I've lived, continue to wage and work for, and the decades of experience and insights I've gleaned and gained from this. As a pan-Africanist, I, too, celebrate the achievement of the Egyptian people in removing Hosni Mubarak from office and applaud the renewed national sense of self expressed in the victory chant, "Lift your head high; you are Egyptian." But I am also acutely aware of the unfinished tasks of this historic struggle and am profoundly concerned about the possible course of ideas, events and actions from this point on.

Clearly, a rightful reading of history demonstrates that the winds of change can blow backwards as well as forward. Indeed, the winds can act as a clearing and cleansing force that blows away obstacles to forward movement. Or they can turn into a tornado of terror that picks up and tears things to pieces, including our houses and hopes, and then dumps the remains down on what's left of our doorsteps. And it is this real threat of bad weather and destructive winds to come against which a prudent people must prepare and stand ready. For as we said and saw in the Sixties, "Our defense depends not on the oppressor not coming, but on our being able to receive him when he does."

Thus, the first concern is the people, their level of consciousness and commitment to the struggle, and their willingness to go all the way. For the successful conclusion of the struggle depends on the people, on their continuing confidence in their capacity, their willingness to sacrifice, their understanding of and commitment to a clear and

compelling set of objectives, and their heightened and resilient organization. As Fanon reminds us, the beginning fervor and will to fight can and often does wane as the struggle continues, the sacrifice increases and the oppressor changes tactics, appearing to collaborate and concede. But as Fanon says, "the people and all their leaders ought to know that historical law which lays down that certain concessions are the cloak for a tighter rein" and can only be met with increased resistance.

Another key concern is the involvement and intervention of the U.S. in the interest of itself and Israel. Caught off guard by the revolt, the U.S., with urging from Israel, at first defended its client Mubarak in the name of continuing stability, necessary support for the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, and his 30-year history of compliant cooperation in invasions, rendition and ruthless repression of revolt and resistance in Egypt, Palestine and the Muslim world, invoking the constantly available boogey man called "terrorism". But when it came to losing the man or keeping the country, the Administration didn't hesitate to dump Mubarak in that deep hole of history hollowed out for no longer useful handmaidens and hirelings.

A third concern is the role of the army, with its CIA-trained and handled elite, committed to continuing its privilege and power, now posing as mediator between the rebels and the regime of oppression of which they were an integral part. Indeed, it is the military that takes most of the \$1.5 billion Egypt receives annually from the U.S. and has shares in almost every Egyptian industry. Sacrificing one of their own to maintain control, they have made them-

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selves the rulers, retained the Emergency Law and left thousands of political prisoners locked up and languishing in captivity. And the U.S. retaining a strategic ally, praises and supports them as guardians of the revolt and the rightful and only rational choice to guide the democracy that is being designed.

Certainly, the fact that thirty years of relentless repression has left no major parties to contest the promised elections and act as a counter-weight to the members of the regime's party whether dissolved or reformed under another name, poses still another major concern. For to hold elections before capable organizations have been formed and a mass process of political education, mobilization and organization for democracy is achieved is to give advantage to the party members of the past regime. But to postpone them for such a democratizing and participatory process is to extend the military rule. This too has to be confronted and dealt with in the interests of the people.

Finally, the battle to win the hearts and minds of the people is already in motion. The corporate media and others talk of the revolt as if it were conceived in the mind of a Google man, given birth on Facebook, and raised to adulthood in a single rally. Such a picture lets them see themselves in the process, but also reduces the social breadth and historical depth of the revolt which has its roots in years of struggle, and happened in its latest form in numerous sites and cities.

This discourse also denies the shared leadership cultivated in the struggle, idealizes personal informational technology instead of portraying it as a tool some, but not all,

used and diminishes the actual sacrifice and costly struggle of the people, themselves. Moreover, it fails to discuss not only the limitations of the tool, but also its utility to the oppressor in singling out, suppressing and blocking the people, and spreading disinformation in various ways.

If the end goal of this process of struggle-negotiations-struggle is real political, economic and social democracy, a governance of, by and for the people of Egypt, it cannot be a so-called "guided democracy" determined in Washington, approved in Israel and co-signed in Europe. Nor can it be a "guided democracy" conceived and constructed by the army or its hand-picked hirelings. Likewise, it is not something to be looked up on Google, formulated on Facebook, and constructed on Twitter.

It must be an organic democracy, not imported or imposed by others, but grounded and grown in the soil of Egyptian society, history and culture; it must be planned and patiently cultivated and brought to fruition by the Egyptian people, themselves. Thus, we must put aside all illusions, reject the oppressor-generated advice and suggestions of quick solutions and prepare for the long, difficult and demanding struggle ahead of us everywhere, from Haiti, Venezuela and Congo to Egypt, from Bolivia, Burma and Puerto Rico to Palestine, Tunisia and Sudan, and from here in the belly of the corporate beast to every place where freedom and justice are threatened or denied, and people strive radically and diligently to bring deep and lasting good in the world.

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